

20 ii/20 Record of Remembrance for Peggy Heeks



PEGGY DASHWOOD HEKS

May 25 1923 – July 27 2019

(Photo taken Feb 2019 at age 95)

As Peggy was a most organised person who liked structure and to be in firm control in her life, it is fitting to position this record of remembrance of her, within a framework to understand her life. Her son, Alan, has said that it was Quakers that gave Peggy a structure through which she could realise her own gifts and interests. These are symbolised by **water, music, family, work, religion, love of learning, & the importance of community**

Quakerism coincided especially with the last three.

Peggy was born in Bournemouth, Dorset and her parents came from Dorset; throughout her life she returned to her roots on visits to Dorset. In fact she has described herself as having been brought up by the sea and she wrote in 2007: *“Water is my element, and that is important to me”*. It was most appropriate that her final years were lived therefore within everyday sight of water, the river Thames flowing south, appreciated from her second floor windows at Pegasus Grange, Oxford.

It was at Pegasus Grange, where Peggy moved shortly before she became a widow, that she found her own community. In 2011 she described this complex of apartments for the elderly built on the style of an Oxford college, as *“...a cross between a boarding school and a conventbut also a source of companionship and support”*. And that was where she lived out the end of her life yet again having been appointed as a Librarian, of that retirement community in 2010, at the age of 87.

Before the Second World War, Peggy attended Bournemouth School for Girls, and during the War, she trained as a nurse, as a young woman. She knew great sadness by the age of 21 when her fiancé died at sea during the final year of the war, a cruel time of her life. However, Leonard Heeks, who had grown up in Slough, where he had been a church

organist and employee at *Hickies* Music Shop, had moved to Bournemouth with his work, and joined the Bournemouth Gramophone Society, and they met there in 1946. This reflected their shared love of music, another of the strands in Peggy's life, and Leonard was to spend his career in the music field. Years later, many Quakers in Oxford benefited from music evenings at the Heeks's north Oxford home towards the end of Leonard's life, and John Welton, who ministered at Peggy's memorial service in November 2019, spoke about this neighbourliness and outreach which had meant so much to him at that time.

Peggy married Leonard on October 11th 1947, in the Anglican Church, and their first son, Alan was born the following year when Peggy was 25. After some hard years, they moved away from the coast for work in Reading, Berkshire, in 1951, when Peggy was 28. Leonard's career with *Hickies* flourished, and he also became a longstanding chair of the Reading Gramophone Society.

Thus began a long period for Peggy of living in and around Reading, where her sons were educated. She began to work as a junior Librarian for the county education service. Alan went to George Palmer Junior School, and later to the good local grammar Reading School, where poetry became important to him. Peggy says of Alan that, when small, "*he used to make coats of arms, and on mine he put **Strive!***" She spoke about Alan's motto for her many years later, when interviewed in 2006, saying: "*I think that may be pretty well true, as I've had lots of struggles*".

Peggy's second son, Richard, was born in 1960 when she was 37. Richard's junior school was Alfred Sutton Junior School, and during these years of his childhood Peggy's life was changing. In 2006 she said of this time: "*....the church of England didn't satisfy us.....we didn't move forward at all there*". She and Leonard had met a Quaker family in Devon on holiday, and were impressed by their sense of integrity and serenity. It was a difficult time for her family and the Quaker Meeting at Reading became something of a haven for them.

Peggy and Leonard joined Reading Quaker Meeting and became active members there for nearly 30 years until moving to Oxford in 1998 and transferring to Oxford Quaker Meeting. By the time Richard moved to the same grammar school as Alan had attended, Reading School, Peggy was convening the Children's Committee at Reading Quaker Meeting, (1968-72). It was challenging work with a growing number of families attending Sunday Quaker Meeting, until the volunteers were providing five classes for one hundred children on the register! As convenor she had to organise for many parents to join the rota to take the classes, about Quaker history and Quakers who had led the way. At Peggy's memorial service, several Reading Friends recalled Peggy's contribution during this time as efficient and professional, inspiring the young parents, often ministering at the start of Meeting for Worship with a story for the children.

This love of story-telling extended to publication! Arising from her developing career as a Librarian, when she had first trained at Bulmershe College after living in Reading for some years, and becoming a Fellow of the Library Association just before Richard's birth, Peggy specialised in early learning and books for the First School. She was interested in the administration of children's libraries (she published a pamphlet on this in 1967). Later with Ralph Whitlock, Peggy published a series of 7 farm stories for children, *Down on the Farm* and others, for 6-11 year olds, (1984-1986). At work she had moved up to become Senior Assistant County Librarian for Berkshire, and by 1979 had gained an MA in Librarianship from the University of Sheffield, aged 56. Her own words describe her motivation:

“As a librarian I am committed to libraries, learning and education”. In her old age she donated a real chair to the Bodleian’s Weston Library when it opened in Oxford in 2015, saying: *“I like to feel that for years to come there will be people using that chair”*.

The commitment to education took her into the academic sphere. By 1988 Peggy had gained a Special Diploma in Educational Studies from Oxford University, and then spent four years obtaining a PhD from Loughborough University (1992) - on the management of educational change. She described her love of learning as *“going back to my childhood”*, and clearly it was a lifelong thread. Peggy’s sons were following in this tradition; Alan studying at Oxford and Harvard Universities in the 1970s, and Richard at Cambridge University in the 1980s, later receiving a higher degree at Leicester and gaining his OU doctorate in 1991, the year before Peggy gained hers at the age of 69 years!

On the Quaker front, Peggy had started to become what is known as a “Committee Friend”. The list provided by grand-daughter Ella, of Quaker committees on which Peggy served between 1980 and 2017 (when she had her fall and cracked her right femur at the age of 93), is awesome! There are almost too many to list; this period of her life when in her sixties, seventies and eighties, extended to working at local Meeting level (Elders, pastoral care and library committees all at both Reading and Oxford Meetings), at Swarthmore Hall in Cumbria, at Woodbrooke College in Birmingham, and at Friends House, London, clerking the Administrative Committee (1985-1993) and attending Meeting for Sufferings (1984-1990). In addition Peggy and Leonard went as Friends in Residence together in 1996, to stay for a semester at each of the Quaker study centres, Pendle Hill outside Philadelphia, USA and Woodbrooke College, Birmingham. Peggy was 73 then, not yet living in Oxford. Woodbrooke College made her an Eva Koch Fellow, and she decided to research London Quaker Yearly Meeting in the nineteenth century, making use of Woodbrooke and Friends House libraries.

Peggy’s interest in Quaker community, mentioned as the other thread in her life at the start of this record, stemmed from a Woodbrooke conference in 1986. It was developed when she was awarded a Joseph Rowntree Quaker Fellowship in 1993/94 and these findings of 12 Quaker Meetings were published as *Reaching to Community*; she found that you do need a vision of meeting as a community but you also need to have an aim of working to fulfil that. Throughout the 1990s the Quaker work on community building continued, through writings, visits and workshops, with Peggy much involved. She had another JRCT grant in 1996/97 to research religious learning and spiritual nurture, and published this study in 1998 as *Growing in the Spirit*. This led Peggy to support the “Hearts and Minds Prepared” Programme and later in the 21st century, the “Kindlers” workshops.

When Peggy and Leonard moved to Oxford, she was already Dr Heeks, and was delighted to receive a Fellowship from Regents Park College, Oxford University at their Centre for Christianity and Culture. It gave her a base and she really loved being there. She did her research on ageing and spirituality and wrote up this research based on 50 interviews with local Oxfordshire Quakers, aged 75 plus. Speaking about this late period of her life, in her eighties, the Director Paul Fiddes, recently retired, described Peggy as seeing herself as *“a bit of an experiment”*. He valued her as a person *“whom spirituality just shone out of”*, during his 19 years there. Peggy used different words about this time: *“...we can recycle ourselves, and that is what I have been doing since 2001, moving from the fields of education and librarianship to becoming (almost) a theologian”*. When she died, some felt she had been a great theological resource to Oxford Meeting, and one member wrote in “43”,

the Oxford Meeting newsletter, that we are all universities, because of our knowledge and living, but if he had realised in time ”..I might have benefitted from a short course at the University of Peggy before that opportunity disappeared forever!”

Peggy was also committed to inter-church ecumenical work, within the Oxford Christian Churches, called Churches Together in Central Oxford, with a great memory and knowledge of all happenings. An Oxford Friend has written of this: *“If she became aware of a particular need, she would summon one of us to join her for coffee and highly focussed discussion”*. The group she was sharing that work with included another Oxford and ex Reading Quaker, and longstanding friend, Elisabeth Salisbury.

There were five Woodbrooke courses which Peggy ran between 2008 and 2016, and Roger Cullen of Charlbury Quaker Meeting, Oxfordshire, writes about his co-tutoring partnership with her. She was the creative inspiration for their courses, which were about Transforming Life Transitions/Finding the Life Narrative. Her beliefs were spread to the Area Meeting and beyond through the pages of *The Friend* and *Friends Quarterly*. At one Area Meeting at Faringdon in 2013 Peggy introduced a session called Ending Well, which had quite an impact. She suggested that as we get older, it is important to do a “life review”, looking back from our perspective now, mending hurts, being reconciled with the living **and** the dead. Roger said she saw no distinction between the spiritual and the pastoral needs of the elderly, she felt that people could be touched at a spiritual level by being given practical help. It informed her pastoral care work, (but she preferred to conceal her **own** age!)

Her final service for Oxford Quakers was as the convenor of the pastoral care group well into her nineties, (2010-2017), which she shared with Mark Ebdon for most of that time. Back in Canada now, he writes about her good judgement and intuition, and her conscientious approach to pastoral care. He was one of several she encouraged into membership of the Society of Friends. Another member of that pastoral care group, described the training days that Peggy used to set up at Charney Manor, outside Oxford, enabling the day to just unfold out of discussions without planning, very organically.

She could be brusque on the phone, as many experienced, but actually she was trying to conceal deteriorating hearing. She preferred meeting us at her home and continued to bake for these teas or make a date to meet in a favourite coffee shop. She could be intimidating or even quite sharp but also extended her friendship generously, taking a personal interest in people. She had acted as a prison minister at Reading HM Prison for a whole decade when living in Reading, 1981-1991, and 20 years later was visiting at a hospice in Oxford and in several residential homes where Quakers lived.

The studies Peggy was making into End of Life at Regents Park College were mirroring her own end of life. One of the courses at Woodbrooke with Roger Cullen, was called “Growing Old Disgracefully”, and was greatly appreciated. She wrote in the Quaker publications about a Good Death. She gave an example of this in a verbal interview in 2006 with Ellen Bassani as: *“to glide peacefully out of life waved on your journey by your family or your friends who are releasing you from life, wishing you well”*. She said that it is the manner of our death we fear more than death itself. Another of her interests became Mysticism, and she wrote in 2007: *“In Quaker history from the beginning there have been two streams – the mystic and the prophetic. My feeling is that we are neglecting the mystic streamand it’s time to recover it”*.

On a personal level, individual Quakers have commented in a variety of ways about how Peggy has touched their lives. These have ranged from her kindness and wisdom and friendship to her ministry in Quaker Meeting. She came across as a teacher, one who never forgot your name, said one member at Oxford, and that was true too when she returned to Reading. Her ministry could be insightful, beautifully crafted, based on Quaker thought and the New Testament, turning this into advice about living in a good way, or “**Heeking**”, as Anne Watson, an Oxford Elder, has dubbed it.

There was no doubt of her love of literature, and in particular T.S Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, which she felt reminded us that our Today has been formed by our Yesterdays. At the age of 91 she was off to Amsterdam “*especially to visit galleries*”, loving art culture as well as music and literature. She thought of souls going forth upon their journey, as in Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius*, but wasn’t sure about the existence of an After Life. Her own death in July 2019 was peaceful as she would have wanted it to be, at home with her son and carers. She even managed to write goodbye correspondence on her arty cards in the spring before she died, to connect with her friends.

Finally, Peggy’s family should be honoured, as the “*ground of her life*”, as she wrote in 2007. This was so evident in the photos her family shared with us at her memorial, showing Peggy centre stage in family pictures, in colourful attire. Sadly husband Leonard had a stroke in 2002 so was increasingly incapacitated until his death in a nearby nursing home in 2009, but he never failed in his concern for her or she in her visits to him. Her two sons each had two children, Ella and Fran (through Alan) and Matt and Nick (through Richard). Ella and her family (two great grandchildren for Peggy - Bernard and Maggie) looked after Peggy as they lived near to her in Iffley. Fran invited Peggy to visit her in New York, for concerts when Peggy was well over 90, perhaps her last long trip before her leg fracture in 2017 and convalescence in 2018.

How richly Peggy lived her long life up to the very end, heeding **Advices & Queries 30**:

“Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully”.

Compiled by Carol Saker, January 2020 with input from Hoonie Feltham, Mark Ebdon, Roger Cullen, Judith Atkinson, Stephen Yeo, Anne Watson, Christine Hayes, Liz Brown, Elisabeth Salisbury, Keith Wilson and contributions at the memorial service